

Dolores Huerta, Activist



Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world.

1 At an early age, Dolores Huerta learned from her mother about the importance of helping others. Her mother ran a motel for farmworkers in California. Her mother often let them stay for a reduced price or for free. The farmworkers were Mexicans, Filipinos, Japanese, and Chinese who worked to pick crops for landowners. It was difficult work and the pay was low. Dolores often listened to the workers talk about their lives and struggles.

2 As a teen, Dolores experienced racism as a Latina. Once, a high school teacher asked her who had written her paper. The teacher did not believe that a Latina could have written such an outstanding essay. When her brother was 15, he was attacked by white men because of the clothing he was wearing. These experiences would impact her path in life.

3 After Dolores graduated college, she started working as a teacher. Many of the students in her school were children of farmworkers. They often came to school hungry and in ragged clothing. Dolores wanted to do more than teach these students; she wanted to make their lives better.

4 Dolores decided to leave teaching and work for the CSO or Community Service Organization. This organization helped Latinas register to vote. It also fought against discrimination and segregation. The organization worked with lawmakers to improve living conditions in urban neighborhoods.

5 Dolores still thought about the farmworkers, though. She wanted to help them as well. So she started the AWA or Agricultural Workers Association. She wanted to improve working conditions for the farmworkers. At the time, farmworkers worked from dawn to dusk without a break. They did not have water to drink or bathrooms to use. Dolores had hoped that the CSO would work with her association and help the farmworkers. But this did not happen.

6 Dolores met another person who wanted to make life better for farmworkers. His name was Cesar Chavez. He

also had an organization to help farmworkers. Dolores and Chavez decided to work together. The AWA merged with NFWA--National Farm Workers Association. Then, in 1965, the NFWA joined with another farm workers association. They felt that they could make more changes if the association was larger. The new organization would be called the United Farm Workers, or UFW.

7 In 1965, a group of grape workers went on strike. They wanted better pay. The workers were part of the UFW. Dolores represented the grape workers as she tried to reach an agreement with the landowners. When the landowners did not want to compromise, she organized a boycott. She asked people to stop buying grapes from California. She also organized a march. Finally, in 1970, the grape workers and the landowners reached an agreement. The grape workers got a contract that gave them better pay and working conditions.

8 After the grape strike, Dolores continued to work for farmworkers. She worked hard to get the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act passed. This act made seasonal workers who were not U.S. citizens find legal work on farms in the United States. Most recently, Dolores has worked hard to get female Latinas into politics. She feels that it is important for Latinas to be represented in local, state, and federal governments.

9 Dolores has made the world a better place for farm workers. She has been recognized for her hard work. Four elementary schools have been named after her. In 1998, she was given the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award. Then in 2012, President Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Activist: A person who works for social and community change

Name: _____

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1. What events in Dolores' life caused her to become an activist?

2. What was the effect of meeting Cesar Chavez?

3. Why would a community choose to name a school after Dolores Heurta?

4. In your opinion, which of Dolores' activities has made the biggest impact in improving life for people? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
